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The Palestinian-Jordanian-Israeli Triangle

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The separation in 1921 by mandatory Britain of the east bank of the Jordan River from the area from the river to the Mediterranean did not eradicate longstanding communal allegiances, which continue to surface and evolve according to political developments. Over the years there has been a very wide range in the various positions on the Jordanian-Palestinian connection, from Jordan's annexation of the West Bank in 1950, which remained under the control of the Arab Legion after the war in 1948, until the complete break of 1988. Nonetheless, Jordan's interest in events on the western side of the Jordan River continues, particularly in connection to Jerusalem. Jordan's demographic reality – more than half of Jordan's citizens are of Palestinian origin – in itself creates a need for Jordanian involvement. However, the issue of Jerusalem gives the Hashemite Kingdom a special status in the Arab world, although not on the same level as the status Saudi Arabia enjoys by virtue of its control of Mecca and Kaaba.

Jordan expressed its practical interest in Jerusalem in two main documents. Article 9 of the 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel states: "Israel respects the present special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim Holy shrines in Jerusalem. When negotiations on the permanent status will take place, Israel will give high priority to the Jordanian historic role in these shrines." A Jordanian-Palestinian parallel of sorts can be found in the agreement signed on March 31, 2013 between King Abdullah II as "the Custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem" (without distinction between Muslims and Christians) and Mahmoud Abbas as "president of the State of Palestine." According to Article 2 of the agreement, the Jordanian king affirms "that all Muslims, now and forever, may travel to and from the Islamic holy sites and worship there" (in the agreement, there is no such promise given to Christians). The King will "administer the Islamic holy sites and...maintain them" and will "represent the interests of the holy sites in relevant international forums." He will also "oversee and manage the institution of Waqf in Jerusalem and its properties in accordance with the laws of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan." This agreement likewise provided Palestinian affirmation of Jordan's claim that its guardianship of the holy places in Jerusalem is based on a

Palestinian appeal from 1924 (Haj Amin al-Husseini and then-Jerusalem mayor Raghib Nashashibi to Sharif Hussein, father of King Abdullah I).

In recent months, tempers have flared on a number of issues on the Israeli-Jordanian leg of the triangle, first and foremost on Jerusalem. The discussion has been conducted on the parliamentary level: Jordanian members of parliament called for a freeze on the peace treaty between the two countries and the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador (after a Jordanian citizen was killed at the Allenby Bridge), and MK Moshe Feiglin initiated a discussion on Israeli sovereignty over the Temple Mount. In both cases, in Jordan and in Israel, the political leadership acted to end the discussions without decisions that could have caused serious political damage.

Despite this intervention, the debate has spilled over into the diplomatic realm as well. The ambassadors of Israel and Jordan recently released statements on events in Jerusalem. On April 2, 2014, Prince Zeid Ra'ad, Jordan's ambassador to the United Nations (who has since announced his resignation), stated in the UN Security Council (of which Jordan is a non-permanent member for 2014-15) that actions by right wing members of the Israeli government and the Knesset "are a challenge and threat to Jordan." Among the actions he mentioned were "regular incursions into the compound," "illegal and intrusive excavations," and renovation of "parts of the wall of the al-Aqsa Mosque without the approval of the Jordanian side." In his response to the UN secretary general, Ron Prosor, Israel's ambassador to the UN, mentioned Article 9 of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty and described Israel's efforts to restore calm on the Temple Mount.

On one level, less covered in the media, Jordan and Israel are developing a relationship based on shared economic interests and the need to cope with political and security constraints resulting from the turmoil in the region over the past three and a half years. The agreements on water and natural gas signed in recent months by Israel, Jordan, and companies in both countries are an important trend, and they show the ability of the two countries' political leaders to separate political interests from provocative attempts to harm this fabric of relations. Cooperation is increasing on the issue of security as well, especially in light of the new challenges created by the situation in Syria and the heavy burden it imposes on the Jordanian defense establishment, which is attempting to seal its common border with its northern neighbor.

The freezing of the negotiating process between Israel and the Palestinians could have a detrimental effect on relations with Jordan. In an April 28, 2014 article in the *Jordan Times*, former Jordanian Foreign Minister Kamal Abu Jaber virulently attacked Israel while using a quotation from Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and accused Israel of causing the failure of mediation efforts by US Secretary of State John Kerry. Indeed, the Jordanian regime is highly sensitive to changes in the relations between Israel and the Palestinians

and the lack of a peace process. If the political stalemate deteriorates into violence, this would certainly arouse anxiety in Amman. Officially Jordan has not been enthusiastic about the reconciliation agreement between the Palestinian factions, and the Prime Minister merely commented on television that his country supports the agreement. Jordan's complex relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, and especially its Jordanian faction, dictate caution and restraint, but circumspection cannot hide the Hashemite regime's preferences, and it can be assumed that Jordan will continue to act behind the scenes to help Abu Mazen and his Fatah movement.

Because of developments anticipated in the wake of the freeze of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the internal Palestinian political process, the continued struggle in Syria, and the possible implications of a crisis with regional dimensions in the context of the Iranian nuclear program, the political leaderships in Jordan and Israel are likely to face difficult challenges and will need to demonstrate great restraint in their conduct. Israel's effort to preserve its relationship with Jordan's political-military leadership is highly important. As such, Israeli reactions to various actions and comments by Jordanian officials, even if they are justified, should be grounded in a comprehensive strategic view of Israel's regional interests.

